

**OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. EDWARD J. MARKEY (D-MA)  
ENERGY AND POWER SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING  
ON ONGOING ENERGY CONCERNS FOR THE AMERICAN CONSUMER:  
NATURAL GAS AND HOME HEATING OIL  
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2000**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I commend you for calling today's hearing to examine the current energy crisis facing our nation.

And that is just what we are facing right now a looming energy crisis. Of course, some folks down in Texas may have another term for what we are experiencing. They call it profit-taking opportunities. But for consumers throughout this nation -- consumers who are worried about whether there will be any supplies of home heating oil this winter and whether they will have to choose between heating and eating, this is a real crisis.

You can do two things when you're see a crisis looming ahead. You can go into denial, or you can take action to avert it. President Clinton and Vice President Gore have chosen to act. The Administration has moved decisively to defuse the short-term supply crisis we are facing by ordering the release of 30 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. At the same time the Administration has put forward proposals to address our nation's longer term energy needs. This plan includes tax incentives for production, for efficiency, and renewables, investments in alternative energy sources, more energy efficient buildings and appliances, alternative fuel vehicles, and transition towards a more efficient and competitive electricity market.

What has been the Republican response? Denial, denunciations, and delay. They deny the need to use the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. They denounce the Administration for acting. And they delay action on the Administration's energy plans. So far this year, the Republicans have slashed solar, renewables and conservation programs by \$1.338 billion below the Administration's request. They've failed to pass legislation the Administration requested to provide tax credits to keep marginal wells in production, or tax credits to spur investment in renewable energy sources and energy efficient technologies.

And now, Republicans are mobilizing to challenge the Administration's plan to deploy the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. That's only for real supply emergencies, says Governor Bush and Republican leaders in Washington. Well, when stockpiles of home heating oil in the Northeast are 60% below the levels last year, and consumers are facing the possibility that there may be literally no oil in the tank in the event of an early cold snap, I'd say we have an emergency.

But the Big Oil Republicans say we can't use the Reserve. Never mind that when DOE has done an oil swaps to help out a big oil company as it has 3 times in the last 4 years -- the Republicans never complained. Never mind the fact that only a year ago, Representatives Armev, DeLay and Blunt joined 35 other Republicans to introduce a bill (H.R. 1649) that would eliminated the Energy Department and abolished the Strategic Petroleum Reserve! Never mind that only four years ago, the Republicans were tapping the Reserve as a slush fund to pay for their tax cuts and budget priorities. Never mind that the Republicans have failed to even reauthorize the SPR Program under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act or permanently authorize a Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve. EPCA expired on March 31st, and the bill to reauthorize it has been languishing over in the Senate for the last six months due to the delaying tactics of certain Republican Senators, who have attached extraneous provisions to the bill in a transparent attempt to kill it. Never mind any of that. The Reserve is suddenly sacred to the GOP! It can't be touched to help consumers!

I even read some disturbing articles in the press yesterday that you, Mr. Chairman, are considering introduction of legislation that would prevent the Administration from moving forward on its plans to release oil from the Reserve. Here is how the press reported on your plans just yesterday:

"Futures contracts hit new highs on afternoon reports that U.S. Republican lawmakers, led by Congressman Joe Barton, R-Texas, were trying to block the release of crude oil from U.S. Reserves on procedural grounds. "The market is down on the release," said [oil market analyst Tom]Bentz. "If there's not going to be a release, were gonna snap back."

So, that's the message from the markets: Stop the release, and we'll snap oil prices right back to \$38 dollars a barrel. Why would you possibly want to drive oil prices back up and prevent American consumers from getting the help they going to need this winter? That's like the Boston Red Sox saying, We really aren't going tot need Babe Ruth, let's just trade him to the Yankees. Well, I don't want to see America afflicted with an energy policy Curse of the Bambino. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is our nation's very own Sultan of Swat to deploy when Middle East oil despots and multinational oil companies curtail supplies. That's why I, along with 70 of my House Democratic colleagues -- including Minority Leader Gephardt, Minority Whip Bonior, and Democratic Caucus Chairman Frost -- have signed onto a letter urging you to abandon your plans to block any release from the Reserve. We go on to say that we are fully prepared to fight any efforts to prevent this oil from getting into the market. And I am fully confident that we can and will prevail in such a battle.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the Administration's decision to release oil from the Reserve will help American consumers, and how the Congress can help can move the Administration's energy agenda forward into law before we adjourn.